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ADDRESS,

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AT THE OPENING

OF

THE NEW-YORK ATHENÆUM,

DECEMBER 14, 1824.



BY HENRY WHEATON.

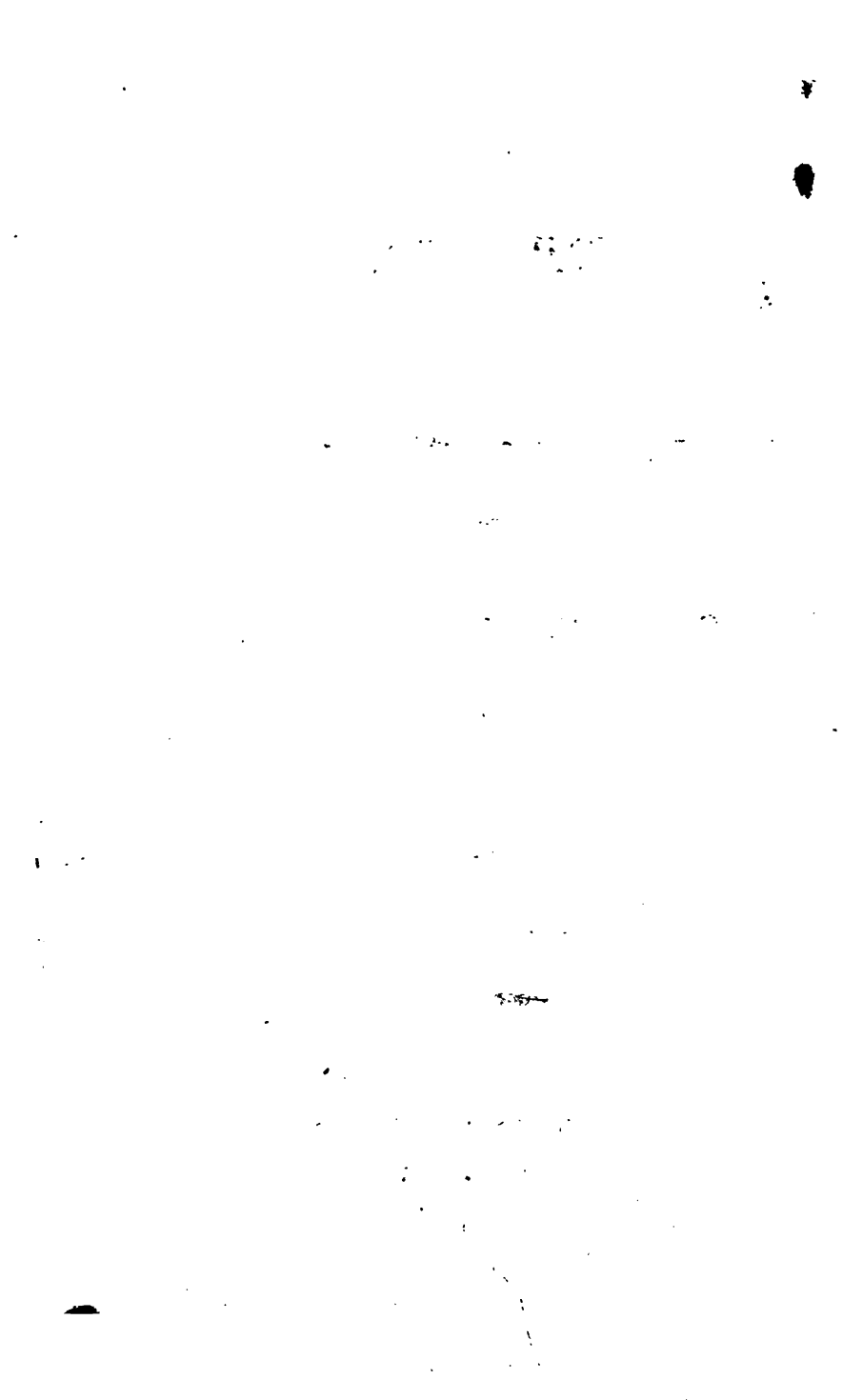


New-York.

C. WILEY, 3 WALL-STREET.

J. W. Palmer & Co. Printers to the Athenæum

1824.



At a Meeting of the Associates and Members of the ATHENÆUM, held at the City Hotel on the 13th December, 1824, an Introductory Address was delivered by HENRY WHEATON, Esq.

Upon motion of Dr. DAVID HOSACK, seconded by the Rev. Dr. WAINWRIGHT—it was *unanimously resolved*, That a Committee be appointed to wait upon Henry Wheaton, Esq., to express to him the sense of this Meeting, in relation to the appropriate and eloquent Address delivered by him this day, and to solicit a copy of the same for publication: Whereupon, the following Gentlemen were appointed a Committee:

DR. DAVID HOSACK,
REV. DR. WAINWRIGHT,
WILLIAM GRACIE, Esq.
REV. MR. SCHROEDER, and the
REV. DR. MATTHEWS.

NEW-YORK, December 13, 1824.

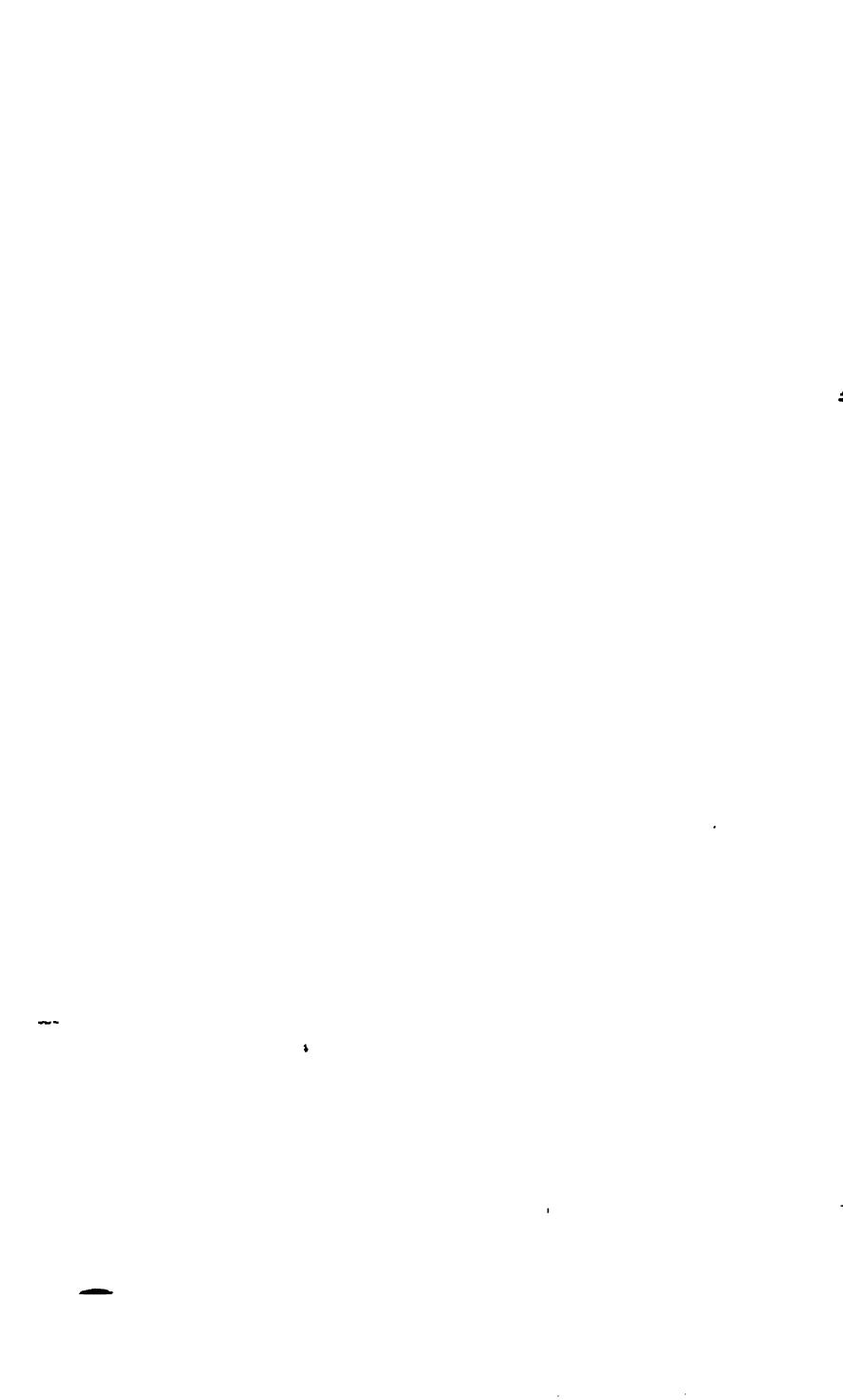
SIR,

It is with unfeigned gratification that the undersigned members of the Committee appointed by the Athenæum, perform the duty assigned them in soliciting for publication a copy of the able and classical Address delivered by you this day. In so doing, we cordially concur in the expression of the unanimous approbation of the Associates and Members of that Institution, and of the numerous and enlightened audience before whom it was delivered.

We are, Sir, with sentiments of great respect,

DAVID HOSACK,
JONA. M. WAINWRIGHT,
WILLIAM GRACIE,
J. F. SCHROEDER.
J. M. MATTHEWS.

To HENRY WHEATON, Esq.



ADDRESS.

IN speaking to you on behalf of an association of literary and scientific men, who have been brought together by the disinterested and honourable motive of diffusing the lights of knowledge, and of contributing something to the cultivation of science in our common country, and who ask for public patronage to their undertaking, I feel that we cannot more usefully employ the time we are to pass together, than by taking a general and rapid retrospect of what the American mind has hitherto accomplished ; and by endeavouring in some degree to anticipate what we may hope shall hereafter be achieved by the intellectual genius of our countrymen. In taking this review of the past, and hazarding these anticipations of the future, we must be careful not to indulge in exaggerated estimates of what we have already performed. Without doubt we have no reason to blush for the want of civil wisdom in those who laid the foundations of this Republic, or to lament the absence of those fa-

bulous prodigies by which the artifice of the eloquent writers of antiquity has illustrated the early annals of those states which stand in the foreground of human history. Neither our colonial condition, nor the civil war which made us a nation, could be considered as propitious to the cultivation of the liberal arts, of science, and of letters. We had great and peculiar difficulties to surmount;—a wilderness to subdue—our physical wants to provide for—our personal and public rights to secure—our independence to purchase with our blood—and the foundations of government to settle. The genius of Franklin, indeed, was capacious enough to pursue the sublime speculations of philosophy in the midst of such scenes and such employments; but in general, the master-spirits of the land found their faculties sufficiently tasked by the great business of war and government.

How far we have since fulfilled the just expectations of those who have been accustomed to associate with the enjoyment of republican freedom, a general taste for liberal arts and studies, sustained by public sympathy, we shall perhaps find it more difficult to answer. Thirty years' enjoyment of peace and of liberty, during which we had gratuitously participated in the rich fruits of European genius

and invention, imposed upon us a heavy weight of obligation in this respect.

The intellect of Europe, far from slumbering during this period, never shone forth with a brighter effulgence. Even the terrific volcano of the French revolution scarcely gave a momentary interruption to the peaceful labours of science; the past glories of English genius have been emulated by the productions of our own times; and the opulent literature of Germany has almost been created since we became a nation. But had our freedom been cloven down in some disastrous field of the late conflict with the parent country, and the American Confederacy now lived only on the historian's page, I fear he would have little else to record than the matchless wisdom by which it was founded, and the splendid acts of heroic valour by which its fate was delayed. Had this been the consummation of our story, those who meditate among the ruins of states and empires, would have found few vestiges of American genius in arts or literature to attract their contemplation. I speak not of the science of government and of practical administration—of the useful arts, or of mere professional learning:—I speak of those arts which adorn and embellish human life—which invigorate and ennoble the spirit of freedom—

which chastise and soften the rudeness of unformed society. Before the period to which I have alluded, no American scholar had successfully attempted to subsist by his literary labours. We had produced no powerful poetry—no classical work of history or biography—no originally inventive works of fiction, (except perhaps the novels of Brown,) which could justly challenge any portion of the admiration of the world and of posterity. A day-spring has since, indeed, dawned upon our view, and brighter prospects now lie before us. A purer and better taste has sprung up among us; instinctively rejecting the ambitious style which threatened to corrupt our literature even before it was formed, and demanding something besides a tame and servile imitation of the English classics. An original school of American poetry has been formed; and writers of fiction have appeared, whom we hail as the genuine interpreters of nature, both as her voice is uttered by man in general, and as she appears among the peculiar associations of our romantic scenery, in our revolutionary story, and our domestic manners. Still we cannot forget the period when a general sense of languor, of feebleness, and of mediocrity weighed upon our literary existence—when there was no demand among us but for active

professional or business talents—when our scholars felt no other incentive to their exertions than the pure pleasures which the cultivation of letters must always bestow.

I do not mean to intimate, in what I have said of the caution necessary to be observed in contemplating what we have already accomplished, that this country has contributed nothing to increase the stores of human knowledge. On the contrary, I am well aware that much injustice has been done us in this respect by the malevolence of European criticism ; and that to have given to the world the model of such a beneficent government, of humane laws, and of an ample provision for the elementary education of the people, and to have sustained them by eloquence and wisdom, adequate to all the occasions by which they have yet been tried, ought to be sufficient to redeem us from the reproach of entirely neglecting the inestimable advantages of our condition. But the illusions of national pride are some of the most formidable obstacles to national improvement. A nation, like an individual, must not only greatly dare—it must not only be conscious of its own intellectual power—but it must hold up to itself an original and elevated standard of intellectual attainments. We may apply to literature in

general, what the great teacher of Roman eloquence says of his own art: *Nam est certe aliquid consummata eloquentia; neque ad eam pervenire natura humani ingenii prohibet; quod si non contingat, altius tamen ibunt qui ad summa nitentur.* But they who fancy that they have already attained the summit, when they have only made some feeble efforts to gain the vantage ground which will enable them to begin to climb the lofty paths of science, will never rise above their own tame conceptions of excellence. The literature of a nation cannot be highly cultivated, and bear its noblest fruits, if it is trained to a servile imitation of models of imaginary perfection, but real mediocrity. It must bear the impress of the nation's own peculiar character—must breathe forth its original thoughts and feelings—must speak of the story and traditions of the land where it dwells, or from whence its fathers came—must connect itself with all that is beautiful or grand in their external scenery, and the moral associations belonging to it.

Among the causes which have hitherto impeded the cultivation of letters in the United States, may probably be enumerated the want of a national language and literature peculiar to ourselves, and the consequent servitude to foreign models. But this will hardly be con-

sidered as a sufficient apology for our past literary deficiencies, when we consider that our fathers spoke and wrote the noble dialect of England, not as a foreign language, but as their own native idiom; that they broke off from the parent stem, after that idiom had been perfected by the pens of Shakspeare, and Milton, and Taylor, and Clarendon; that their descendants have constantly been supplied with the standard productions of the British press, and have never been strangers to the real or supposed improvements which each successive age has wrought in English diction. During all this lapse of time, the genial soil of England has never ceased to bear fruits and flowers worthy of the spring-time of her literature, though often suppressed in their growth by foreign and false modes of culture. Our countrymen were therefore, in this respect, placed upon an equal footing with their British brethren. Originality of language is immaterial to the success of literary enterprise. The language of the mind is to be found in its own vigorous, overpowering thoughts and emotions. It matters not in what dialect they are poured forth. The forms of diction used by different nations who write the same language, are no more necessarily alike, than those of different individuals: nor is the imitation of the classi-

cal models of English style more likely to have an unfavourable influence upon an American, than a British writer—upon a Franklin or a Frisbie, than upon a Burke or a Johnson. It is the faculty of true genius to assimilate with itself, and incorporate into its own intellectual nature, the elements produced by other minds. Thus the poetical powers of Dante and Milton were nourished, and sustained, and strengthened, by the ambrosial food of Virgil and Homer. In highly-gifted and well-regulated minds, the profound study and ardent admiration of such models produces merely the effects of that liberal imitation which teaches them to think, speak, and write, as other great men would have thought, spoken and written, when placed in the same circumstances. We shall therefore find ourselves compelled to attribute our literary poverty to the want of true intellectual courage and enterprise—to the want of that noble self-reliance and consciousness of intellectual power, which has of late only been seen among us ; rather than to the possession and full enjoyment of the literary riches which have been showered upon us from the abundant sources of the parent country.

The defect of patronage, and of those aids which are united in the extensive libraries,

museums, and laboratories, which the taste and munificence of European sovereigns and republics have collected and founded, may with more appearance of justice be considered as real obstacles to the growth and improvement of science and letters among us. At the same time, we cannot be unmindful of the change which has taken place in the usages of society in this particular. The foundations of that dependence, in which men of letters were once held upon the great, have been shaken; and that disgraceful commerce of servility and flattery, which once prevailed between them, has almost ceased. Instead of the patronage of princes and nobles, who demand expensive adulation, we have that of a reading public, the most numerous in proportion to our populousness which the world has yet seen. The writer of genius and learning who is able at once to instruct and delight mankind by the labours of his pen, needs, as recent experience has shown, no other patronage than that of the great body of his countrymen. If, before the event to which I have already referred as marking a new epoch in our intellectual history, one or two writers of ingenious fiction or smooth poetry were overlooked by the American public, whilst every thing that issued from the British press, and had receiv-

ed the sanction of the higher tribunals of criticism on the other side of the Atlantic was eagerly sought for, it is probably to be attributed to that sense of helplessness and dependence which had become almost a part of our intellectual nature. It may perhaps be considered as one of the greatest incidental benefits we have derived from the vindication of our national rights in the late war with Great Britain, that it revived and quickened our sense of national pride, roused all those generous emotions connected with the love of country, and stimulated our ambition to be distinguished in every thing which contributes to true national glory.

Such political events are often the precursors of great changes in the intellectual character of a people : the passions excited by a sense of the public danger, and the faculties exerted to repel it, give a new impulse and energy to the national genius, which is afterwards directed with fresh activity to other objects.

Whether this event was one of the efficient causes of that new spring which has recently been given to our literary enterprise ; or whether it merely marks the epoch when other causes combining have produced the same effect, it is certain that unless our endeavours are effectually aided and encouraged by am-

pler endowments for the higher branches of education, and by the establishment of more extensive libraries of references and more perfect collections of scientific instruments—the hopes of those who take an intense interest in our literary prosperity and reputation must be deferred to a more auspicious season. We do not expect or require the magnificence of the Alexandrian and Pergamean—of the Bodleian or Vatican collections; but all who have had occasion to investigate any subject beyond the confines of mere professional learning, or the popular literature and current politics of the day, must have experienced the painful mortification of being arrested in their course for want of the books necessary to complete it. The circle of human knowledge is immense; and though the works of those master minds, who have exercised a decisive influence on opinion in any age, are few in number, yet no subject of science or literature can be thoroughly investigated without taking a wide range. Even the largest libraries in the country fall far short of its literary wants;—but our own city has been peculiarly deficient in this respect, and we confidently hope that one of the earliest fruits of our association will be the foundation of a library, which shall be worthy of that liberal spirit and munificence

which ought to characterize the commercial metropolis of America. No private resources can compass even the new works of science and literature which annually issue from the printing presses of America and Europe ; and there is no institution yet established among us endowed with funds adequate for such an object. But this is indispensably necessary, were it for no other purpose than merely to keep pace with the literary and scientific history of the age. Unless the progress of knowledge is accurately known, how can the man of science or letters on this side the Atlantic, determine in what direction to pursue his inquiries ? How can he foresee, in treading any of the innumerable paths which modern science has opened, that his steps will not be crossed in some direction, and the interesting discoveries he fondly supposes he has made, be found to have been anticipated by some more fortunate or better guided adventurer ? Many of those branches of literature which depend upon minute and laborious research—upon the collation of authorities, and comparison of testimonies, (such as the science of philology or verbal criticism, and the illustration of antiquities,) will always be best cultivated in the older countries of Europe, where the division and cheapness of literary labour facilitate its

operations. But the results of the patient industry, and profound learning of the classical scholars and antiquaries of Germany and England, must ever be an object of interest with our own students of ancient literature. Above all, the piercing eyes which the former have sent into the dark recesses of antiquity, and the sagacity with which they have sought to discover the causes of the grandeur and decay of those nations who have disappeared from the face of the globe, by studying the true spirit of their institutions and manners, must fix on their researches the curiosity of the lover of historical studies—a curiosity which can only be gratified by having access to their voluminous and constantly increasing collections. But it is not in the wrecks of another world alone, that the activity of human intellect is now busying itself. The grand physical features of the globe are explored with an enterprise and courage, and the conquests of science are pursued with an ardour and perseverance, which eminently distinguish the present age above all the generations of men that have preceded it. The rapid progress of these discoveries cannot be followed without the aid of expensive books, drawings, engravings, and maps—of models of ancient buildings, copies of gems, medals,

coins, statues, and busts ; not merely for the purposes of art, but in order to illustrate the civil history, the religion, the manners and customs of nations—to facilitate the researches of the student of geography, of history, of classical literature, of antiquities—to give precision and life to his knowledge—to impart reality and vigour to his conceptions of things absent and past.

If there are some circumstances in our condition which have hitherto impeded our literary progress, there are other considerations which should encourage those amongst us who have devoted themselves to the cause of science, to persevere in their purpose of rousing the attention of their countrymen to objects so essentially connected with national grandeur and happiness. Among these considerations may be reckoned the peculiar geographical features of our country, and the federative scheme of its government ; its division into different states connected together by a wise political union ; and the consequent emulation among the different members of the confederacy to excel, not only in their political and economical institutions, but in the liberal arts and sciences. Whatever fate is in reserve for our country, we are certain that its intellectual energies can never be confined within the

walls of a single capital ; where the exclusive standards of taste are monopolized and applied to repress the excesses of genius, and check the intellectual freedom of the whole nation—whose literary circles exercise a capricious tyranny over the land—and to whose critical tribunals the unfortunate provincial candidate for literary fame must bow in humble submission.

In this respect, our situation may be compared to that of modern Italy before the 16th century, or to the present condition of Germany ; where the literary rivalry of so many different states and cities has produced such an accumulation of intellectual wealth, and diffused it over the land ; where each city vies with the other in the great men and the beautiful monuments of art of which it can boast ; where individual genius shoots forth its luxuriant branches in every direction, and a general activity of circulation is kept alive by this generous spirit of emulation. Had the various states of Italy, at the epoch to which I have referred, been consolidated into one vast empire, the emulation between its different provinces would have instantly ceased : there would have been but one school of letters and of art throughout the whole Peninsula. It would have been supposed, that its beautiful lan-

guage could be spoken and written with purity and taste at Rome alone : Italian poetry would have lost its originality and variety ; and every other art would have felt the palsy influence of the same servile constraint and unbending uniformity. That cluster of great men who gathered round the court of every petty prince, or were collected in every free city, would have been unknown to fame. So too the rich and varied literature of Germany owes much of its originality and energy to the fortunate neglect or contempt with which its earliest efforts were treated by the sovereigns of Austria and Prussia, whilst it found a refuge in the free cities and at the polished courts of the less powerful princes. It is not at Berlin or Vienna, but at Weimar, that we are to look for the German Athens : but it is above all, in the solitary, unaided workings of individual genius, that we shall find the most splendid creations of her intellect. As one of her own poets has said—"The songs of the German
 " bards resounded from the summit of the
 " mountains, and dashed like a rapid torrent
 " across the vales ; the independent poet recognised no other laws than the impressions
 " of his own free soul,—no other sovereign than
 " his own genius."

Well would it have been for these beautiful

and famous countries, if their splendid genius or happy fortune had enabled them to form a federal league, of sufficient energy to protect them against foreign aggression. Many of their loftiest speculations of science and most beautiful works of literature and art would have been advantageously exchanged for such a discovery. But we must remember that a well adjusted constitution of such a form of government, of sufficient vigour to repel foreign violence, whilst it is not strong enough to crush the individual members of the league, is one of the most refined and abstract speculations of political philosophy ; one of the latest and maturest efforts of human wisdom, enlightened by the calamitous experience of ages. The loosest confederacy may answer the purposes of common defence in the infancy of society, and in those rude ages when the spirit of freedom first springs up in a nation ; but when civilization, and arts, and commerce have advanced, bringing with them luxury and its attendant vices in their train, the adaptation of such a government to the wants of a great nation presents one of the most difficult questions of political science. Had the countrymen of Machiavel and Guicciardini, with all their political wisdom and sagacity, been able to realize the solution of this problem, the independence

of Italy, which was achieved by the turbulent but generous spirits of the twelfth century, might perhaps have been prolonged to our own times ; and the pilgrims of other countries, instead of the solitary column which stands before the palace of *the Senator* at Rome, the feeble representative of that august body of which he is the shadow, would have found the living soul of that liberty which fired the patriot tribune Rienzi.* The traveller, who wanders over that fair land, covered, not only with the wrecks of its former grandeur, but with the still enduring monuments of ancient and modern genius ; where every object of art or nature is associated with some heroic recollections—*nullum sine nomine saxum* ; finds man alone degenerated, lost to all the virtues which constitute the truest dignity of his nature ; the wretched slave of his passions, his vices, and his foreign, barbarian oppressors. May heaven avert the omen ! May our happy union not be torn asunder, even before we have gathered its best fruits in the successful cultiva-

* This column is supposed to have belonged to a temple of Jupiter *Custos*. It is of Grecian marble, of the Corinthian order, and 64 palms high. *Vasi, Itin. Tom. 1. p. 110.* “ Une colonne, débris d’un temple de Jupiter Gardien, placé, dit-on, non loin de l’abîme où s’est précipité Curtius.” *De Stael, Corinne, tom. 1, liv. 2, chap. 4.*

tion of science and of letters, under the shadow of its protecting wings; and before we have produced any works of art or genius to command the admiration and envy of posterity, and worthy of that glorious liberty, the choicest of the many blessings which Providence has showered upon us !

To some readers of history popular government has been thought unpropitious to the cultivation of literature. The epochs of its splendour have been distinguished by the names, and ascribed to the patronage of some tyrant of Greece—some Ptolemy of Egypt—some Roman emperor or Arabian caliph. Thus a late compiler of Grecian history, able and learned no doubt, but a calumniator of Democracy—after giving the previous history of Athens, and especially adverting to the glories which immediately succeeded the Persian invasion, thus notices the “ wonderful and singular phenomenon in the history of mankind, too little accounted for by any thing recorded by ancient, or imagined by modern writers, that during this *period of turbulence*, in a commonwealth whose whole population in free subjects amounted scarcely to thirty thousand families, art, science, fine taste, and politeness, should have risen to that perfection which has made Athens the mistress of the

“ world through all succeeding ages. Some sci-
 “ ences indeed have been carried higher in mo-
 “ dern times, and art has put forth new branches,
 “ of which some have given new helps to sci-
 “ ence : but Athens in that age reached a per-
 “ fection of taste that no country hath since
 “ surpassed ; but, on the contrary, all have
 “ looked up to as a polar star, by which, after
 “ sinking into the deepest barbarism, taste has
 “ been guided in its restoration to splendour,
 “ and the observation of which will probably
 “ ever be the surest preservative against its
 “ future corruption or decay.” “ Much of
 “ these circumstances of glory to Athens, and
 “ of improvement since so extensively spread
 “ over the world, was owing to *Pericles*. *Pei-*
 “ *sistratus* had nourished the infancy of Attic
 “ genius ; *Pericles* brought it to maturity. In
 “ the age of *Peisistratus*, books were scarcely
 “ known, science was vague, and art still rude ;
 “ but during the *turbulent period* which inter-
 “ vened, things had been so wonderfully pre-
 “ pared, that in the age of *Pericles*, science
 “ and every polite art waited, as it were, only
 “ his magic touch to exhibit them to the world
 “ in meridian splendour.”

Without dwelling upon the obliquity of mind
 or disingenuousness which marks this passage,
 and which could affect not to see the true

causes of this intellectual splendour ; what, let me ask, was the *turbulence* of this period ? It was the contest of freemen for their equal rights—the conflict of factions and of parties, the inevitable concomitant of freedom—the rivalry and collision of ardent minds, ambitious of every kind of distinction—the lively and intense interest which every citizen, however humble, felt in all that concerned the prosperity and glory of the state, of which he considered himself an efficient member. This was the master-spring which put in motion every faculty of the soul. Eloquence was cultivated as the powerful engine with which to work on public opinion ; and to render this eloquence effectual with such an audience, the most refined graces of action—the most exquisite beauties of language—every resource of moral and political knowledge were put in requisition. In ‘this *turbulent* school Pericles himself was disciplined, and caught the inspiration which enabled him to exhibit “ that finished model of the simple and sublime in “ oratory which has been the admiration of all “ succeeding ages.” But he had not the *plastic* hand which could mould a Phidias from all the marble of Attica, or create a Sophocles or Thucydides—a Plato or a Xenophon, by dispensing his own or the public treasure.

They too had dipped in the troubled waters of Democracy ; like himself, they were some of “ the more vigorous plants which the wildness of free minds alone can furnish.”

There is something truly admirable in the spectacle of these ancient Republics ; where, although the loosely compacted machinery of government afforded but an imperfect security for the enjoyment of individual rights, each citizen lived, and moved, and breathed, only in his country ; where no thought, or desire, or passion was indulged, but for the prosperity of the state ; and where every selfish and sordid feeling was swallowed up in the all-engrossing sentiment of patriotism. From the same prolific source—from the shattered republics of Greece, (where the spirit of liberty still fondly lingered,) Ptolomy Philadelphus was enabled to draw around him that constellation of literary and scientific men, which for ages rendered Alexander the intellectual Pharos of the world. So too at Rome, from the struggle of the Gracchi, to the usurpation of Cæsar—it was the light stricken out by the collision of parties, the freedom of discussion, the zeal with which every citizen advocated or opposed the measures of a government in which he participated, that sharpened the faculties and directed the studies of her illustrious men—

and to which we are indebted for the greatest literary treasure which has descended to us from antiquity, the elegant, the invaluable works of Cicero. The majestic language of Latium was formed, and polished, and all but perfected, before the usurpation of Octavius. It received its highest perfection, in point of elegance and grace combined, from the hand of Terence, who was the companion of the younger Scipio and of Lælius. It was the spirit of the "Old Republic" which survived the field of Pharsalia, to which may be attributed all that we admire in the finished writers of the Augustan age; while we count as loss and dross only the fulsome flattery which stains the immortal pages of Virgil and Horace—the price of patronage! When even the semblance of a free government was no longer observed under the military despotism which succeeded, literature declined—the Muses hid their heads: or if, under the milder reign of a Trajan or the Antonines, "by the rare felicity of the times, a man might think what he pleased, and publish what he thought;" it was still the spirit of the "Old Republic" which hovered over him, invigorated his genius, and guided his pen. If the fine arts had so degenerated in the age of Constantine, that he was compelled to strip the monuments of his pre-

decessors at Rome of the statues and bas-reliefs, the work of a better age, in order to adorn with their spoils his new capital on the borders of the Bosphorus, we may easily imagine what must have been the fate of letters and of eloquence, oppressed under the double yoke of ecclesiastical and political tyranny. The destruction of ancient art and genius was begun and nearly completed, long before the rude invaders of the north and the east shook the throne of the Cæsars. The springs of society were worn out—a universal torpor and the stillness of death was diffused over its smooth surface, where all was fair and all was deceitful: public spirit and public virtue were become extinct—the animating soul of genius had fled.

In short, if the internal constitutions of the ancient republics were badly constructed—if they were not proof against the storms and tempests that awaited them—if they did not afford such complete security for private and personal rights as our modern societies; they were the nurseries of genius and learning, of bold conception and manly thought; to them are we indebted for the development of the best and noblest faculties of human nature—"for all heroic deeds and fair desires." It may be that the men of those

days appear of a more gigantic stature in the haze of a distant antiquity, or amidst the glare with which the eloquent writers of their own times have surrounded them. But after making these deductions, it must be allowed that there was something in the institutions of Greece and Rome, which, if it contributed less to private happiness and domestic tranquillity, was even more favourable to the display of great powers of thought and action, than the most wisely constituted and nicely balanced governments of modern times.

If any additional proof were wanting, of the almost inseparable connexion between the growth of the polite arts, and national independence and civil freedom, it would be found in the simultaneous revival of letters and liberty on the favoured soil of Italy. In the midst of the fierce contentions of the Italian republics of the middle ages, whilst they struggled against each other in fatal hostility, or leagued to repel the attacks of their common enemies; whilst the bosom of every state was agitated with the most violent convulsions, and the rancour of adverse factions was transmitted in deadly hate from generation to generation; the arts and literature started, as it were, from the sepulchres, where they had been shrouded in the darkness of a thousand years, and put

on new forms of life and beauty. The true dignity of human nature was once more asserted in the public councils and acts of these communities, and especially of Florence, where three or four thousand free citizens occupied, in rapid rotation, the first offices of the state, sustained with wisdom and firmness the rights and honour of their country, and acquired an extent of political knowledge and political acuteness, which baffled the skill of all the courts and cabinets of Europe. It was amidst the storms of her "fierce democratie," that the sublime genius of Michael Angelo was nursed. To the agitation of its billows we are indebted for the wonderful poetry of Dante, with all its terrific energy. He had been a leader among the political factions of his country—and the deep tones of his implacable scorn and hate of the base betrayers of her independence and freedom, powerfully contrast with the deeper pathos of his allusions to all he had loved and cherished in Arno's sweet vale.

It is to the munificence, taste, and liberality of Cosmo, the first Medici of that name, that we owe the recovery of many of the most valuable remains of ancient literature. His exquisite taste in the arts, and his deep erudition, enabled him to judge what was most worthy

of recovery and preservation among the remains of antiquity, and of patronage among the productions of the dawning genius of his countrymen. He was a merchant, and at the same time a statesman and a scholar—who appropriated the gains of his trade, not in selfish sensuality or ostentatious display, but in the patronage of learning and the arts—not in embellishing his own private mansion, or in heaping up inordinate wealth for his children, but in adorning his native city with permanent monuments of taste and genius—in founding magnificent libraries and museums, which still attest the former grandeur of his country. His immense wealth and his commercial connexions, which embraced every part of the then civilized world, were employed in the service of letters. The agents of his commercial houses in every country of Europe, and of the East were instructed to collect all the most precious works of art, and the most rare and valuable manuscripts. He was saluted in his own life-time with the title of Father of his Country ; his praises have been re-echoed by the gratitude of letters in every age ; and his name will be transmitted to the latest posterity as one of the most distinguished benefactors of mankind.

Such is the return which commerce should make for the immense obligations she owes to science. From the men who first read the stars on the plains of Chaldæa, and guided by their light "the ships of the desert" in search of the riches of the East—frankincense and myrrh, "barbaric pearl and gold"—until Vasco de Gama encountered the stormy genius of the African cape, and the Genoese pilot launched his frail barks upon the broad Atlantic : and still more in our own adventurous and enlightened times, has commerce been indebted to science for opening to her view new paths of enterprise, and new sources of wealth. So too, commerce has ever delighted to dwell in the haunts of freedom, and under her powerful protection. If the city of Pallas was the first to establish equal laws, she was also the foremost in sending forth her sons to colonize the barbarous regions of the earth, to diffuse the soft light of Grecian letters and art, and to bind together the most distant nations by the pacific and humanizing ties of civilization and commerce.

But American commerce is above all deeply indebted to freedom and to science—to the enlightened sagacity of the statesmen who looked forward through the darkness of the future, to foresee the triumphs which awaited

her enterprise and industry, (more splendid than the fabled achievements of the Argonauts)—of the men who laid the deep and solid foundations of her security in the constitution of their country, who constructed it as much for commerce as for liberty—for justice—and for security against foreign aggression. If commerce be the surest basis of the maritime power and grandeur of a nation, let it also be remembered that national power may become only the instrument of injustice to others, and of self-inflicted misery on its possessors, unless it be enlightened by wisdom ; unless it be chastised and mitigated by the propitious influence of taste and learning. The superabundant capitals accumulated by the merchants of this country, are already seeking new channels of employment. They are, in the natural order of society, flowing into the reservoirs opened for them by the useful arts, and again diffusing themselves and animating every branch of industry. They are ministering to the improvement of the interior, in every thing which contributes to the comforts of civilized man—making the wilderness to blossom as the rose—bridging the broad floods, and excavating the lofty barriers, which seem to have been interposed, not to deter, but to excite the persevering courage of man

to overcome the difficulties which are insuperable to all but the eye of genius. Soon shall these gigantic aqueducts overleap the ramparts of the Appalachian, not (as we fondly hope) to bear some future Hannibal or Napoleon to the conquest of the fertile plains of the west,—but to unite the father of floods with the waters of the Atlantic—to carry the peaceful triumphs of American industry beyond that other rampart which stands as if to forbid our approach to the shores of the Pacific. If commerce is already able to spare from her coffers the means of constructing these monuments, grander far than those by which the Eternal City signalized her dominion over the subject world—surely she may, out of her abundance, contribute something to the still nobler object of improving the higher and better part of our nature—of adding to the gratification of those wants which nature and civilization have created, the improvement of our intellectual faculties—the embellishment of life by all those arts which give to polished society its chief ornament and grace—and the exaltation of the national character, by that superiority which the general sentiment of mankind has regarded as the chief title to distinction. In the decline of national greatness, freedom may fade—agriculture may languish and decay—

riches and the useful arts may take to themselves wings, and fly to some more genial clime: but the glory of science and letters will survive the general wreck, and command for the nation whom they have once illustrated, the admiration and sympathy of the world. Every object of art or nature with which the achievements of such a nation are associated, the mountain streams of her poetry—the battle plains on which her freedom was lost or won—the vestiges of her ruined temples and senate houses—the places where her patriots stood forth to avert her doom with the warning, prophetic voice of wisdom—all these are sacred in the eyes of the generous and the free, who throng from every clime to tread her “haunted, holy ground.” What is it but this that lends such an irresistible charm to that country in whose struggles for a new existence, the wise and the good, in every region, take such an intense interest? There are other skies as fair—other fruits as golden—and other mountains with forms as romantic and graceful as those of Hellas. But her’s is the land of Gods and godlike men.

In that fair clime, the lonely herdsman, stretch’d
On the soft grass, through half a summer’s day,
With music lulled his indolent repose :
And in some fit of weariness, if he,

When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear
 A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds
 Which his poor skill could make, his fancy fetch'd,
 Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,
 A beardless youth, who touched a golden lute,
 And filled th' illumined groves with ravishment.

This sacred light, which the imagination of the Greeks thus brought from above, has been since transmitted to, and found a welcome, in every clime where there were hearts capable of feeling its influence : it has shot across the universe, and cheered the nations with its rays : it has left a bright track behind it, and points to man the path to that heaven from whence it came. The Greeks thus became the parents and instructors of mankind in poetry, in philosophy, in eloquence, in art, in all that contributes to the true dignity of human nature. For these gifts, the grateful benedictions of their fellow men, in every region of the civilized globe, ascend and wait upon their holy conflict. Strike, sons of Hellas, for freedom and for vengeance ! Arise, Pallas, and guard thy beloved walls with the terrors of that Ægis, which frighted the stern soul of Alaric from his barbarous intent !*

* Zozimus relates that in the invasion of Greece by Alaric, A. D. 396, the walls of Athens were protected from his fury by the goddess Minerva, with her formidable Ægis, and

Such are the high incentives which should impel us in the career of intellectual improvement, and such the bright anticipations we may indulge from the peculiar advantages of our situation as a nation. But the progress of society has been so rapid; the improvements and discoveries in politics, in morals, in arts, and in manners, have been so great; and such, above all, is the vantage ground that we have gained as a nation, that even if the lights of history should fail us in the novelty of our peculiar situation, and a review of other times and other countries should afford us no analogies on which we could certainly rely, we should still have a right to look forward with cheerful confidence to the future. We inherit from our ancestors a government of law and liberty, which we feel and know to be favourable to the development of every liberal talent. We may rely upon its permanency with the stronger assurance, because no other form

by the angry phantom of Achilles. *Gibbon*, *Decline and Fall*, c. 30.

Where was thine *Ægis*, *Pallas*! that appall'd
 Stern *Alaric* and *Havoc* on their way?
 Where *Peleus'* son? whom hell in vain enthrall'd
 His shade from *Hades* upon that dread day
 Bursting to light in terrible array!

Byron, *Childe Harold*, Canto 2, Stanza xiv.

of rule is suited to our habits, our manners, and our condition ; and because it has already endured the test of two hundred years' experience. The political institutions and genius of our people have always been essentially republican from the first settlement of the country. Our ancestors were the cotemporaries of the great men whose free spirit bursting forth in the first reign of the Stuarts, prepared the glories of the English Commonwealth, and by the final expulsion of that infatuated race, laid the foundations of that pre-eminence, Great Britain has since enjoyed in arts, in letters, and in national power. This confirmed stability of our institutions is a consoling reflection, since the constitution of a government is not the invention of a day ; it must be the living offspring of time and experience : it must grow with the growth, and strengthen with the strength of a nation : it must entwine itself with every fibre of its existence ; and become incorporated with its other institutions, with its manners and usages, its feelings, and its opinions.

From among the various dialects of modern Europe, we have fortunately inherited a copious, free, and manly language ; not the slave of inflexible forms of diction, but capable of receiving the varied impressions of unrestrain-

ed genius ; a language already diffused from the rising to the setting sun—from the banks of the Ganges to those of the Missouri—from the Arctic circle to the remotest regions of Australasia. The age in which we live is, more than any other that has preceded it, the age of intellectual exertion, and of intellectual power. Never before did literary men exercise so great an influence over public opinion ; not merely that of individuals and of nations, but over the powerful of the earth, and those to whom the happiness of millions is committed. It may also be emphatically called a reading age. To say nothing of those ancient races of men who carried many of the arts of civilization to the highest pitch of splendour, but to whom the art of alphabetical writing was wholly unknown—the men who covered the walls of Thebes and Persepolis with eternal emblems of inscrutable mystery ; even those nations that were acquainted with the use of letters—the Greeks and Romans, imparted their knowledge chiefly by oral instruction, which must have slowly descended to the mass of the people. Even that eloquence, which, in the glowing language of poetry,

“ Shook th’ arsenal, and fulmin’d over Greece,

“ To Macedon and Artaxerxes’ throne——”

was in truth confined within the walls of a sin-

gle city. It could not take the wings which the art of printing has since lent to thought, and thus be diffused over the habitable globe. By this aid the scholar now speaks from his closet to millions of thinking beings. At the present moment there is a larger proportion of the civilized inhabitants of the earth, who read extensively, than at any former period since the invention of letters. If this be true of old Europe, it is still more true of our happy country, where the means of education are so widely disseminated.

The general improvement of the age has been powerfully reflected upon the condition and character of the female sex. Women have been raised in the scale of social estimation, not only above the rank they enjoyed in the most polished states of antiquity, but in that boasted age of chivalry, where the affectation of romantic loyalty, and devotion to the sex, was so strongly contrasted with their real degradation. How different are the qualities which attracted this devotion, from that standard of excellence which public opinion now requires in the female character in order to command its homage and respect: how different from that state of society and of mental cultivation which produced the intellectual energy of "the blameless wife of Roland," and

the magic eloquence of the admirable CORINNA ; or from that higher and more ethereal region of mind and morals where dwelt the pure spirits of the Edgeworths and the Mores.

Largior hic campos æther et lumine vestit

Purpureo ; solemque suum, sua sidera norunt.

Nothing then seems to be wanting to promote the progress of science and letters among us, but public sympathy, and a more active encouragement to every exertion of our literary men. In this they are to find both their reward and the incentive to fresh endeavours. This encouragement is especially due to every attempt to enlarge the means of instruction ; to draw science down from lofty abstraction to practical use ; to bring it home to men's business and bosoms—to diffuse a general taste for the liberal arts and letters throughout society. I will not speak to you of the agreeable relaxation to be found in these pursuits from the oppressive toils and cares of business, and the still more oppressive toils and cares of fashionable dissipation ; of their talismanic power to avert the malignant influence of that demon who lurks in the train of excessive civilization and refinement, and poisons the fountains of pleasure in polished life. I will not remind you of the consolation afforded by the cultivation of letters in adversity—of

the balm it ministers to the soul wounded in its dearest affections—of the pure and elevated enjoyments it bestows. I will not speak to you of these, because I know you will be influenced by other more disinterested and more patriotic motives to countenance with your protection and patronage the enterprise in which we are engaged. We believe that it is closely connected with the happiness of society, and with the permanent prosperity and true glory of our common country. We feel that it appeals powerfully to the wise and the good ; to those generous minds who do not despair of the Commonwealth ; to those who would labour for a distant posterity with the certainty that their toils will not be unrequited. We inhabit a land of vast extent, possessing every variety of soil and climate, and abounding with natural scenery, the most picturesque, romantic and grand. The increase of our population has, as yet, found little or no resistance in the want of the means of subsistence. Its tide is now swelling and overflowing in every direction ; and perhaps before some of those who are now present shall see death, it will equal, if not surpass, that of the greatest empires of the old world. But this rapid increase of numbers will not be attended with a correspondent

increase of happiness, unless the region of intellect is cultivated as well as that which yields a supply to our physical wants. Man has higher wants and capacities. His soul is filled with aspirations after knowledge and fame; with an insatiable thirst of happiness, which seeks for its gratification, not in the enjoyments of sense, but in the cultivation of the powers of his intellectual and moral nature. The sentiment of patriotism is not merely associated with the clods of the valley which gave us birth. It is complicated of the recollections of the great men our country has produced; of their heroic and beneficent actions; of affection for its institutions, its manners, its fame in arts and in arms. This sentiment must be cherished and invigorated by associating with it an enlightened love of liberty—a taste for knowledge, and an ardent enthusiasm for those arts which lend to human existence its most refined enjoyments. Could the genius of our country reveal to our astonished view the future glories which await the progress of confederated America; could he show us the countless millions who will swarm in the wide-spread valleys of the West, tasting of happiness, and sharing the blessings of equal laws; could he unrol the pages of her history, and permit us to see the

fierce struggles of her factions—the rapid mutations of her empire—the bloody fields of her triumphs and her disasters: could he crowd these awful visions upon our souls, we should then see that all the prosperity that awaits us depends on the supremacy of mind—on the cultivation of the intellect—on the diffusion of knowledge and the arts; not merely to the chosen few, but to that immense multitude who are at once invested with the privileges of Freedom and the prerogatives of Power.



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